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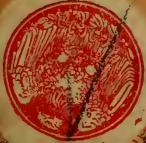
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1909

D A Mothers' Meeting

Price, 15 Cents



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BOSTON

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A Mothers' Meeting

An Entertainment in One Scene

For Female Characters

By

ARLO BATES

*Author of "A Business Meeting," "A Gentle
Fury," "Her Deaf Ear," "An In-
terrupted Proposal," etc.*

BOSTON

WALTER H. BAKER & CO.

1909

A Mothers' Meeting

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

MRS. GILFLORA SMITHE.
MRS. MERCY BROWNE.
MRS. SAMPSON HOYT.
MISS SELINA GRAY.
MISS ARAMINTA SHARP.

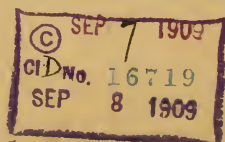
MRS. CROWLER.
MRS. HENDERSON.
MRS. LOWELL.
MISS KEENE.
MISS WHITE.

JANE, *a maid*.

All except Mrs. Lowell and Jane are in street costume, but have left their wraps outside.



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A Mothers' Meeting

SCENE.—*A parlor. Ten chairs are loosely arranged in a sort of semicircle facing the audience. At the back a small table stands against the wall. On another table at one side is a work-basket with usual contents, including a long-handled darning-ball.*

Enter MRS. LOWELL and MRS. CROWLER *talking.*

MRS. LOWELL. I am so glad you came early, Mrs. Crowler. You can tell me what we are expected to do at a Mothers' Meeting. I never went to one.

MRS. CROWLER. Oh, don't ask me! My husband says the meeting is to give the old maids a chance to tell mothers how to bring up their children.

MRS. L. Ha! ha! I wish I dared to repeat that to Araminta Sharp. She's sure to do a lot of talking. (*Enter* MRS. BROWNE.) How do you do, Mrs. Browne?

MRS. BROWNE. How do you do? Which one of us is sure to do a lot of talking?

MRS. L. Mrs. Crowler says her husband said ——

MRS. C. Ssssh! (*Enter* MISS SHARP. *A bag hangs on her arm.*) How do you do, Araminta?

MRS. L. Good-afternoon, Miss Sharp. I suppose you've come full of ideas. You always bring so many new thoughts to all our meetings.

MISS SHARP. It is so good of you to say so, Mrs. Lowell. I do try to put my experience at the service of my fellow beings.

MISS KEENE (*entering while she speaks*). But there won't be any fellow beings here, Araminta; we are all women.

MISS S. Ha, ha, ha! You are always our jester, Miss Keene.

MRS. B. Your experience will be so valuable to us mothers, Miss Sharp.

MISS S. Hem! Well, perhaps an outsider can see things in a more philosophical light, Mrs. Browne. We are not so likely to be prejudiced.

MISS K. Children do break things up so that they don't leave a theory whole.

MRS. B. Humph! Good thing it is, too. Too much theory is as bad for a child as too much baking-powder is for bread.

Enter MRS. HOYT. MRS. L. goes to meet her.

MRS. L. My dear Mrs. Hoyt, I am so glad you could come. You know just what a Mothers' Meeting ought to be.

MRS. HOYT. Thank you. I have had the privilege of attending a Mothers' Meeting in Boston, and of course in Boston maternity is looked at only on its highest ethical plane. They have such high ideals in Boston.

MISS S. At least they think they know everything.

MRS. C. My husband says they think they're so good they don't even bother heaven to make their marriages.

MRS. HOYT. I don't wish to be censorious, but I must say that to me such a remark seems a little irreverent.

MRS. C. Oh, my husband doesn't mean any harm. That's just his joke.

MRS. HOYT. But when it comes to making heaven the subject of a jest —

MISS S. I'm sure Boston isn't heaven. The last time I was there I had my pocket picked and got an awful cold.

MISS K. What did you have in your pocket to keep out the cold?

MISS S. Nothing! Nothing whatever!

Enter MRS. SMITHE and MISS GRAY. MRS. L. and others greet them.

MRS. SMITHE. Miss Gray thought she ought not to come, because she's not a mother; but I told her —

MISS GRAY. Oh, Mrs. Smithe, I said because I'd never married.

MRS. B. Well, if you never married, of course you wouldn't be a —

MRS. HOYT. Mrs. Browne, you shock me!

MRS. C. My husband says that if you want to know how to bring up children you ought always to ask the people that never had any.

MRS. S. They are generally willing enough to tell.

Enter MRS. HENDERSON and MISS WHITE. Greetings are exchanged. The ladies talk together. MRS. B., MISS K., and MISS S. stand together in front, R. MRS. H. and MRS. HOYT seat themselves in front, L.

MRS. B. What a good time Mrs. Hoyt will have telling us all about the way they have Mothers' Meetings in Boston. I can't endure that pompous way of hers.

MISS S. She'd better tell how she brought up that boy of hers, so that everybody'll know just what not to do. He's a disgrace to the town.

MRS. B. What's he been doing now?

MISS S. They say he's carrying on awfully at Harvard. My cousin, who knows one of the mothers of a boy in his class —

MISS K. How many mothers do Harvard boys generally have?

MRS. B. There, there, don't make jokes. I want to know what Miss Sharp heard.

MISS S. She says there's a chorus girl —

MISS K. A chorus girl!

MISS S. Yes; Miss Flossie Montmorenci.

MRS. B. Of course that isn't her real name.

MISS S. Of course not. Flossie Montmorenci is only the name she goes by on the stage.

MRS. B. But what about her?

MISS S. Why, they say he's just crazy about her, and —

MISS K. Ssssh! Not so loud. His mother'll hear you.

(They whisper together. MRS. HOYT, who has seen them look toward her, seems uneasy. She turns to MRS. H., and indicates the group by a slight motion of her hand.)

MRS. HOYT. Do see those women with their heads together. I'll warrant they're talking scandal.

MRS. HENDERSON. Oh, I guess not. If they are, it won't hurt us if we don't hear it.

MRS. L. Ladies, I think we are all here. Perhaps we'd

better begin. Won't you be seated, please? (*They take seats, except MRS. L. MISS S., and MISS K., R. F., MRS. B. next. MRS. H. is L. F., with MRS. HOYT next to her. The others are in any convenient order.*) I suppose we ought to have some sort of a regular way of beginning.

MRS. B. The first thing is to choose a lady to be chairman.

MISS WHITE. I second the motion.

MISS S. 'There isn't any motion.

MRS. B. It's the same thing. I could have made a motion, couldn't I, if I'd thought of it?

MISS S. How could you make a motion without a chairman?

MRS. S. If you didn't, you couldn't ever have a chairman.

MISS S. Well, I don't see how a motion is any good if there's nobody to put it, and nobody has a right to put it but the chairman.

MRS. HOYT. It's parliamentary practice that settles it.

MISS G. I'm sure the secretary has a right to put a motion. I've done it often at the Sewing Circle.

MISS S. But the secretary is always elected after the chairman.

MRS. L. I wish I knew the way the men do it.

MISS S. I don't know why the men should always be held up as a pattern to us. I should hope we had brains enough to make our own rules.

MRS. H. The rule you want to make, Araminta, seems to be that we shall never elect a chairman, because we haven't a chairman before we elect him.

MRS. L. Will somebody tell me what to do?

MRS. B. You should put the motion.

MRS. L. I don't know as I've any right to put it; but this is my house, so I'm sure the ladies will excuse me. I don't know exactly what the motion is, but those in favor will say, Ay. 'Tis a vote.

MRS. S. It seems as if a Mothers' Meeting ought to be different from a regular business meeting.

MRS. C. My husband says no woman's business meeting ever was regular.

MISS S. That's just sheer impertinence.

MRS. C. Oh, it's just his joke.

MRS. L. Ladies, will you please come to order? Mrs. Hoyt has been to a Mothers' Meeting in Boston, so of course she knows all about it.

MRS. HOYT (*rising quickly*). Why, ladies, since you wish me to take the chair——

MISS S. (*aside*). Who wished her to?

MRS. L. Of course. That's just the thing. Miss White, will you help me, please, with this table?

(MRS. L. and MISS W. bring forward the table from the back and place a chair behind it. MRS. C. takes the place left vacant by MRS. HOYT, MRS. L. the chair which MRS. C. leaves. MRS. HOYT seats herself behind the table.)

MRS. HOYT. I suppose I ought to have a gavel, to rap to order with: but anything will do.

(MRS. L. rises and tooks about a little; then she goes to work-basket, gets darning-ball, and gives it to MRS. HOYT.)

MRS. L. This is almost the same shape.

MRS. C. Won't my husband laugh when I tell him we had a darning-ball for a gavel?

MISS S. You ought to be ashamed to tell him so he can make fun of us.

MRS. C. Oh, he doesn't mean any harm. It's just his joke.

MRS. HOYT (*rapping*). Ladies, will you please come to order? (*She rises impressively.*) We have come together to consider one of the most serious problems which can engage——can engage—— Hem! one of the most serious problems which can engage——

MRS. B. (*aside*). She's made up a speech and forgotten it.

MRS. HOYT. As I was saying, ladies, we have come together to consider one of the most serious problems which can engage—— Hem! If you will excuse me a moment, I will consult a few notes that I made on my return from Boston. I think I left them in my coat-pocket.

(*She goes out. The others exchange glances and smiles.*)

MRS. B. That's why she got up this meeting,—so as to give us her rehash of Boston ideas.

MISS K. Boston baked beans warmed over.

MRS. H. I don't think she'll have any beans.

MISS W. Oh, I'm sure she won't. Why should she have beans in her coat-pocket?

MISS S. Can't you see a joke? Mrs. Hoyt just wanted a chance to air somebody's ideas that she heard in Boston.

MRS. S. (*going to the table and taking the place left by MRS. HOYT*). Perhaps I'd better be chairman while Mrs. Hoyt is gone, or there won't be any meeting legally when she comes back.

MRS. L. But if you preside, won't it be a meeting of the Sewing Circle? That's what you are president of.

MISS G. Why shouldn't we have a meeting of the Sewing Circle? We've got to decide whether we shall send a box of clothes to the Home Missionary Society this fall.

MRS. B. Oh, I'm so tired of sending clothes to the missionaries. Why can't they dress like the people they're with? It would give them a great deal more influence.

MISS S. And a piece of string costs so little.

MRS. H. I don't see what a piece of string has to do with their dressing like the natives, but I don't think it's kind to talk about the poor things as if they were just bundles.

MRS. L. But don't you think we'd better put the money into painting the vestry?

MISS W. I second the motion.

MRS. H. There isn't any motion; and think of the poor missionaries that don't have clothes even for their little children.

MISS K. But in that case they can see so much more of them.

MRS. H. See more of them? How would that make any difference?

MISS G. That's one of Miss Keene's jokes. I must say I don't think it's a very delicate one.

MRS. B. Oh, I see! See more of their children because they haven't any clothes! How awfully funny!

MISS W. How awfully witty you are, Miss Keene.

MRS. S. (*rapping*). Ladies, ladies! Please come to order. (*Reënter MRS. HOYT with manuscript.*) This is serious business.

MRS. B. Yes, this is the most serious subject that can engage—can engage——

(*The others cry "Sssh!" and furtively indicate MRS.*

HOYT. MRS. B. turns and sees MRS. HOYT. MRS. S. has not yet seen the chairwoman.)

MRS. S. I'm sure, ladies, that I see no subject for levity.

MRS. HOYT (*advancing with great dignity*). Perhaps I am the point of the jest. May I ask what is the subject under discussion?

MRS. S. We were having a meeting of the Sewing Circle while we waited for you.

MRS. HOYT. Oh, very well. I won't intrude; although as a member of the Sewing Circle I think I might have been notified.

MRS. H. But there weren't any notices.

MRS. HOYT. Then there shouldn't have been any meeting. (*She moves slowly and with great dignity toward the door.*) Good-day, ladies. I should be very sorry to intrude.

MRS. L. (*hurrying after her and bringing her back*). Oh, Mrs. Hoyt; don't go.

MRS. S. Of course I yield the chair to you now you've come back.

MRS. B. But don't you think that now we are on the subject of the missionary-box we'd better come to some decision?

Miss W. I second the motion.

Miss S. Oh, by all means; and then we can decide about the tree next Christmas and the Fourth of July celebration and the Sunday-school picnic next August.

MRS. S. (*retiring to her original seat*). I don't see any occasion for sarcasm, Miss Sharp.

(MRS. HOYT *stands behind the table and unfolds her manuscript. The ladies settle themselves to listen.*)

MRS. HOYT (*reads*). We have come together to consider the work of the most intricate and subtle poet that ever engaged — (*She stops in confusion, and examines her paper.*) Ladies, I do not know how to apologize! I have made a most unfortunate mistake, and brought the wrong paper.

MRS. H. Isn't that something you could read just as well? I'm sure we should love to hear anything you had written.

MRS. HOYT. Why, this is an essay on the ethical trend of Robert Browning.

MRS. H. Oh, well, read that. What difference does it make?

MRS. HOYT. Why, I don't know, I'm sure. I wrote this for the Browning Club, and it wouldn't do to read it twice.

MRS. B. (*grimly*). You might read the other paper at the Browning Club. I suppose Robert Browning had a mother.

MRS. HOYT. Why, I suppose so; but I don't see exactly —

MISS S. Nonsense! This is the Mothers' Meeting, and we can't have a paper on Robert Browning. He certainly wasn't a mother, if he *did* have one.

MRS. HOYT. Well, if you think so, I'll save this to read at the Browning Club: but I'm awfully sorry to have you lose the other. I will only say that we have come together to consider the way in which a mother should fulfil her sacred duty in the matter of rearing her children. There was a lot more in the paper, but I can't seem to remember it. In Boston they had a paper and then discussed it. We can have the discussion all the same if we don't have the paper.

MISS S. I should be sorry to put myself forward, but I happen to have with me a short paper on this very subject: and perhaps the ladies will allow me to read it in place of the eloquent essay we have lost. (*The ladies exchange smiles while she takes out of the bag on her arm a manuscript.* MRS. HOYT sits. MISS S. goes to stand beside the table. She begins to read with a manner of exaggerated seriousness.) "Doctor," said a young mother, "how soon shall I begin the education of my son?" "Madame," responded the physician, "how old is your child?" "Three days," she responded. "Then, madame," he replied impressively, "if you have not already begun his education, you have lost beyond recovery—three days."

MISS G. Excuse me for interrupting; but did you say three days?

MISS S. Three days.

MRS. L. I'm sure I don't know what I could have taught Charlie when he was three days old. He's seven years old now, and I only try to be good to him.

MRS. B. Miss Sharp, did you ever see a baby three days old?

MISS S. I—I don't remember.

MRS. B. Humph! If you had, you'd know that that doctor was an idiot!

MRS. H. Oh, I dare say he meant well.

MRS. S. I have always felt that kindness is the secret of bringing up children.

MISS K. Don't you think that it used to be the fashion for parents to bring children up, and now it's the style for children to bring parents down?

MISS W. Oh, how awfully funny!

MRS. B. To me that sounds just plain silly.

MRS. C. My husband says the way to bring children up is to stop talking about it and attend to business.

MRS. L. I think children should be indulged a little. Of course they have their little ways, but we have too.

MISS W. Of course we have.

MISS S. May I go on with the reading? (*Reads.*) The important thing is to begin at once, before the warring influences of environment have stamped upon the snow-white infant soul the characters of worldliness and of mischief.

(She drops a sheet; while she recovers it the ladies speak.)

MRS. H. Well, I must say I wouldn't give much for a child that hadn't any mischief in it.

MISS W. Nor I either.

MRS. B. Well, when you think what it costs to get the mischief out of them —

MISS W. So it does!

MRS. HOYT. There is where firmness of character comes in. It is necessary above everything to be firm with a child.

MISS G. (*aside*). She never held her own five minutes against her own boy.

MRS. HOYT. Children very soon learn that there is a firm hand over them, and that is the main thing.

MRS. L. Well, I don't know. I've just tried to make Charlie love me so he'd want to do what I tell him.

MRS. C. They never mind unless they're afraid of being punished.

MRS. L. Charlie always minds. (*Enter JANE, who makes signs to MRS. L.*) Do you want me, Jane?

JANE. Oh, Mrs. Lowell, excuse me, but Charlie's at the jam again, and he won't stop eating it.

MRS. L. Tell him he mustn't.

JANE. I did, but he won't stop. He'll make himself sick, the way he did last week.

MRS. L. Tell him he'll make mother unhappy.

JANE. I did, and he just grinned.

MRS. L. Poor dear! I'll speak to him. Excuse me, ladies. [*Exit JANE, followed by MRS. L.*]

MISS S. "Charlie always minds."

MRS. HOYT. You see the lamentable results of a lack of firmness.

MRS. H. But if you're too hard on them, they get to be sly.

MRS. HOYT. Henry never deceives *me*.

MISS K. (*aside, to MRS. B.*). Do you suppose he's told her about Flossie Montmorenci?

MRS. S. Shall we hear the rest of Miss Sharp's paper?

MISS S. (*reads*). The ideal training of children depends largely upon a proper respect for the integrity of their individuality. The greatest injury that can be done to the growing mind is to interfere with its innate subjectivity.

MRS. B. Excuse me; but would you mind reading that last sentence again?

MISS S. The greatest injury that can be done to a growing mind is to interfere with its innate subjectivity.

MRS. B. Humph! I hope you know what that means.

MRS. W. Perhaps it's explained later.

MRS. C. My husband says we shouldn't think a club paper was any good if we could understand it.

MISS S. (*angrily*). It seems to me, ladies, that we hear about as much of Mrs. Crowler's husband's opinions at our meetings as we should if he were here; and I move that if he has anything more to say about us and our doings, he be invited to come and say it!

MISS W. I second the — Oh, no; I don't, I don't! It would be awful to have a man hear what we say!

MRS. C. (*laughing heartily*). Oh, my husband will just about die when I tell him this! He'll never get over it!

MISS S. It is shameful that tales should be told —

MRS. H. There, there, Miss Sharp; don't get excited. Who cares if the men do talk? They must have something to keep them pleasant.

MRS. B. I dare say all our husbands laugh about us. I should if I was a man.

MISS S. Mine doesn't! — I mean I'm glad I haven't got one if that's the way they act!

MRS. HOYT (*rapping*). Come to order, please, ladies. Miss Sharp, will you go on with your most interesting paper?

MISS S. (*reads*). The mind of a child is protoplasm, and must be allowed to go forward rhythmically in its own beautiful development from embryonic negation to perfected individuality.

(A murmur of admiration from the ladies, except MRS. B., who sniffs contemptuously.)

MRS. B. I don't know what rhythmic protoplasm is, but I'm sure my Edward never had anything of the kind when he was a baby. I'd have taken him to a doctor if he had.

(A sensation. Miss S. opens her mouth to reply, but is interrupted by the reëntrance of MRS. L. with a telegram in her hand.)

MRS. L. Here's a telegram for you, Mrs. Hoyt. The boy brought it over, and I thought it might be important.

MRS. HOYT *(taking the telegram while they all watch eagerly, and opening it nervously)*. Thank you. I dare say Henry is coming home. *(She reads, gives a little scream, and starts up frantically.)* Married! Oh, it can't be! Oh, my poor deceived boy!

SEVERAL LADIES. Married! Henry married?

MISS K. Not to the chorus girl?

MRS. HOYT. What! Oh, how did you know?

(She falls in her chair and faints. The telegram drops upon the table. All rise. Several ladies rush to help her. Miss S. takes the telegram, and she and Miss K. come down front, where Miss S. reads it aloud.)

MISS S. "I have married Miss Flossie Montmorenci of the Gaiety Theatre. She is a peach." My stars! The wickedness of men!

MISS G. *(who has joined them)*. What, to get married?

MISS K. Well, I must say he has emerged from embryonic negation into perfected individuality with a vengeance!

MRS. H. *(who has remained standing near her seat, L. F.)* Ladies, do you think this is kind? I might almost ask if you think it is honorable.

(She takes the telegram from Miss S. and restores it to the table just as MRS. HOYT recovers.)

MRS. HOYT. Ladies, I hope you will excuse me. A telegram is always so sudden, you know. They always frighten me. I will go home. I don't feel very well.

(She takes the telegram, and is helped out by Mrs. L. and Miss W. The other ladies look at each other and slowly follow.)

Mrs. C. My husband will say that if it wasn't so tragic, it would be awfully funny to see what firmness comes to.

Mrs. H. We mothers couldn't say that, Mrs. Crowler.

Miss S. Well, anyway, it's a queer end for a Mothers' Meeting.

(As they move toward the door the curtain falls.)

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